

2. Preparing to Set Up Your Library

What you need to do first



Before you can open your library, there are 10 main tasks that you need to carry out. These are listed below in the recommended order and are covered in more detail in the following chapters.

(You will notice the checkmark symbol throughout the book to draw your attention to checklists that will help you stay organised. Also see chapter 15.)

- Organise a library committee and decide on library rules, opening times, staffing, and the amount of help you need from library monitors.
- Decide on the method of lending books.
- Prepare the library room, make the bookshelves, and organise equipment and stationery.
- Check that the library is secure.
- Get to know the different types of library stock and the parts of a book. If you already have a library, you will need to check for damaged or inappropriate stock to remove.
- Make an 'accession register' to record the books that the library receives. Glue the nameplate and, depending on your lending method, a return date label into all books.
- Divide books into fiction and information (non-fiction). Divide information books into subject areas. Give each book a spine label.
- Make library catalogues. This will include a shelf list and title catalogue.
- Put books on shelves. Arrange information books by subject. Arrange fiction books in alphabetical order by the author's last name.
- Make shelf guides so that books can be found easily and check that your lending system is fully operational. Put

up a subject index and posters on the walls to make the library look more attractive and to remind readers of any rules about using or borrowing books.

Why you need to do this

However time-consuming these tasks seem to be, you will find that careful attention at an early stage will ensure your school has a well-organised library. This will encourage people to use the stock and will help you to run the library day by day. We want you to think through the important issues before you start so that you can plan for success. Every library is a little different and should be designed with the local readers in mind.

You should share and pass on your library organising skills, so that if you decide to leave, the library will not close. It often happens that a school has an excellent library for a few years, but then the librarian leaves and problems start because no one else has the skills to continue running it.

How much time will it take?

Each library will take a different amount of time to set up, depending on how much time you and others can spend on it, and depending on whether you already have the room and furniture prepared. All that work will be worth it once you have the library open, but be prepared for it to take quite a bit of time. To give you an idea, M'e Mathabeng, a librarian in Lesotho, received her books from the African Library Project in March and opened the library in November. She spent April and May working on the accession register, June and July planning and organising the library, and August, September, and October training the student librarians, the staff, and the other students.



Figure 2.1. A poster showing the members of a library committee in Malawi.

How to start – the library committee

Your first task is to organise a library committee. A library committee will enable you to share library skills and decisions and encourage people to use the library. As you think about whom to ask to be on the library committee, keep the following questions in mind:

- What skills do we need in our library committee? (transport, building shelves, organising the books, raising money for supplies, organising the inventory system, leadership, publicity)

- Will there be officers for the committee? If so, who?
- Who will handle our finances? (See chapter 17.)
- How often will we need to meet?
- How will decisions be made?

One way to set up a library committee that has worked successfully for other libraries is to include the librarian as secretary, the headteacher or English teacher as chairperson, and one other teacher, as well as two parents, if possible.

Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) play an essential role in our schools. They ensure that the students visit the library every week. Parents are in the libraries every day helping.

*- Benjamin Modimoothata,
Chair, Umbrella PTA, Botswana*

Even if the headteacher is not part of the library committee, 'the support of the headteacher is necessary to have a successful library', according to Rose-Junior Matsenjwa, Swaziland National Library Service.

You should also have at least two girl students and two boy students on the committee for a school library, and at least two women and two men for a community library. There are two ways of choosing students for the library committee: you can either ask students to vote for representatives or you can appoint responsible students.

Fikile G. Mnisi, Librarian at St. Joseph's Primary School, Swaziland, advises that you 'involve students in library rules formation so that they find it easy to keep their rules'.

The library committee should meet regularly, perhaps once a month while you are getting started and then at the start and end of every school term.

As the librarian, you will be an important committee member. To help you advise the committee and suggest ways to improve the library, you should, wherever possible,

arrange a visit to an established library. This could be the national library, an academic library, or an established school or community library. If possible, you should arrange to work alongside library staff for a few days to familiarise yourself with library routines and procedures. This direct experience of a working library will allow you to visualise the guidelines and alternatives described in this book, and help guide the decisions of the library committee.

It is a good idea to rotate librarians so that everyone learns the system, takes ownership, and does not get overworked. Be sure to write down all the policies and procedures of the library so that the next librarian will be able to take over if you are transferred.

What the library committee does

The committee must interpret what users want from their library. The committee will help select books and make management decisions about library opening times, borrowing methods, and classification. It will also decide how to spend the budget and perhaps set a caution fee or fine system for books that are returned late and/or are damaged.

A library committee is an excellent way to make your library popular. Because the committee members have helped to make decisions about the project, other staff, students, and community members are likely to be encouraged by their enthusiasm.

The library committee also decides which books should be removed from the stock, either because their content is unsuitable or because they are damaged and cannot be repaired. In some countries, books are so expensive and so hard to obtain that you should be cautious about removing stock just because it is old.

The library committee should agree about which items must stay permanently in the library and should not be lent out. These will include all reference books and any

books the committee wants to look after extra carefully. An example might be *Where There Is No Doctor*. This is a health manual that is very popular because it is well written and makes difficult medical terms easy to understand. If your library has only one copy of this book, it might be better to keep it in the reference section, where readers can use it to find quick answers. However, if you have several copies, keep one in the reference section and classify the other copies in the information section so that people can borrow the book if they want.

How to involve others

Do not let your library committee grow too large: 10 people is enough and a smaller number may be even better. From time to time, discuss whether there is anyone else who should be invited to join the committee. If there is a lot of interest, make sure people can share their ideas about the library in other ways aside from joining the committee. This can be done through library monitors and volunteers, a library club, and a suggestions book. Having library monitors, volunteers, and a library club are excellent ideas because readers can help you with the day-to-day running of the library at the same time as learning new skills. This will encourage students to keep using libraries when they leave school and may inspire them to become librarians!

What are library monitors and volunteers?

Library monitors are responsible individuals you can train to help with the day-to-day running of the library, such as issuing books and returning books to shelves. Library monitors can also make new displays, create enthusiasm for competitions, and help find 'lost books'.

Becoming a library monitor should be a privilege. You will need about 10 people who are really keen to help run the library. One way to choose monitors is to ask people to let you know who wants to be a monitor. If more than 10 people are interested, then ask students or community members to vote for their library monitors. It is best to

Building a Great Team – Best Practices from the ALP Summit

Roles

- Clearly assign responsibilities and delegate.
- Identify strengths of each member and assign jobs accordingly.

Team dynamics

- Share ownership for what needs to happen and for the success of the team.
- Create a safe environment to encourage ideas. Ask for ideas and look for the positives.
- Have fun together! The tone you set will reverberate throughout the library.
- Show respect for each other's ideas and build on ideas instead of criticising.
- Discuss any conflicts, breakdowns of communication, or problems of avoidance.
- Listen carefully and encourage expression of candid views and feelings.
- Criticise constructively – point towards a better future.
- Talk honestly about feelings.
- Do group exercises to build teamwork.
- Encourage each other – lift each other up.

Goals and measurement

- Set SMART goals – specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, timely.
- Create a checklist and use it to track progress – measure your progress towards the goals.
- Break up the work into small chunks to carry out over a series of meetings.
- Hold reviews of status of all assignments.
- Record your decisions.

Recognition

- Acknowledge each other.
- Recognise contributions of team members.
- Share rewards equally.

do this by secret ballot, but do try to make sure you have equal numbers of boys and girls or men and women chosen as monitors. Alternatively, you could ask teachers if they would be willing to let students elect one or two people as class monitors. If the forms are mixed sexes, ask for one girl and one boy library monitor from each form. One of the best ways of encouraging more women to become librarians is to get girls to use the library while they are at school. Good ways to involve them are to make them library monitors and to encourage them to join the library club. At a school library, the library monitors should be students, but you should also welcome parent volunteers, who can do similar tasks as the library monitors.

What is a library club?

A library club is made up of students interested in learning more about the library and helping with library work. Many schools have clubs that meet once or twice a week for extra woodwork, cooking, sewing, sports, or craft lessons. You could use club time to set up a library club. Train library club members to do book repairs and other library duties, such as replacing books on the fiction and information bookshelves. You could ask members to be responsible for making new library displays, pinning up students' work, and arranging special trips.

Organising day trips to places of interest and factories may attract students to join the club. Information about places could be read before trips, and then when students return they could write down their experiences.

- Daniel Aidoo, who worked as a library assistant at Central Regional Library, Ghana

What is a suggestions book?

A suggestions book is an exercise book kept in the library for people to write down suggestions about the library and titles of books they would like to read. Look at the suggestions book regularly: you are sure to find some ideas in it that will improve your library.